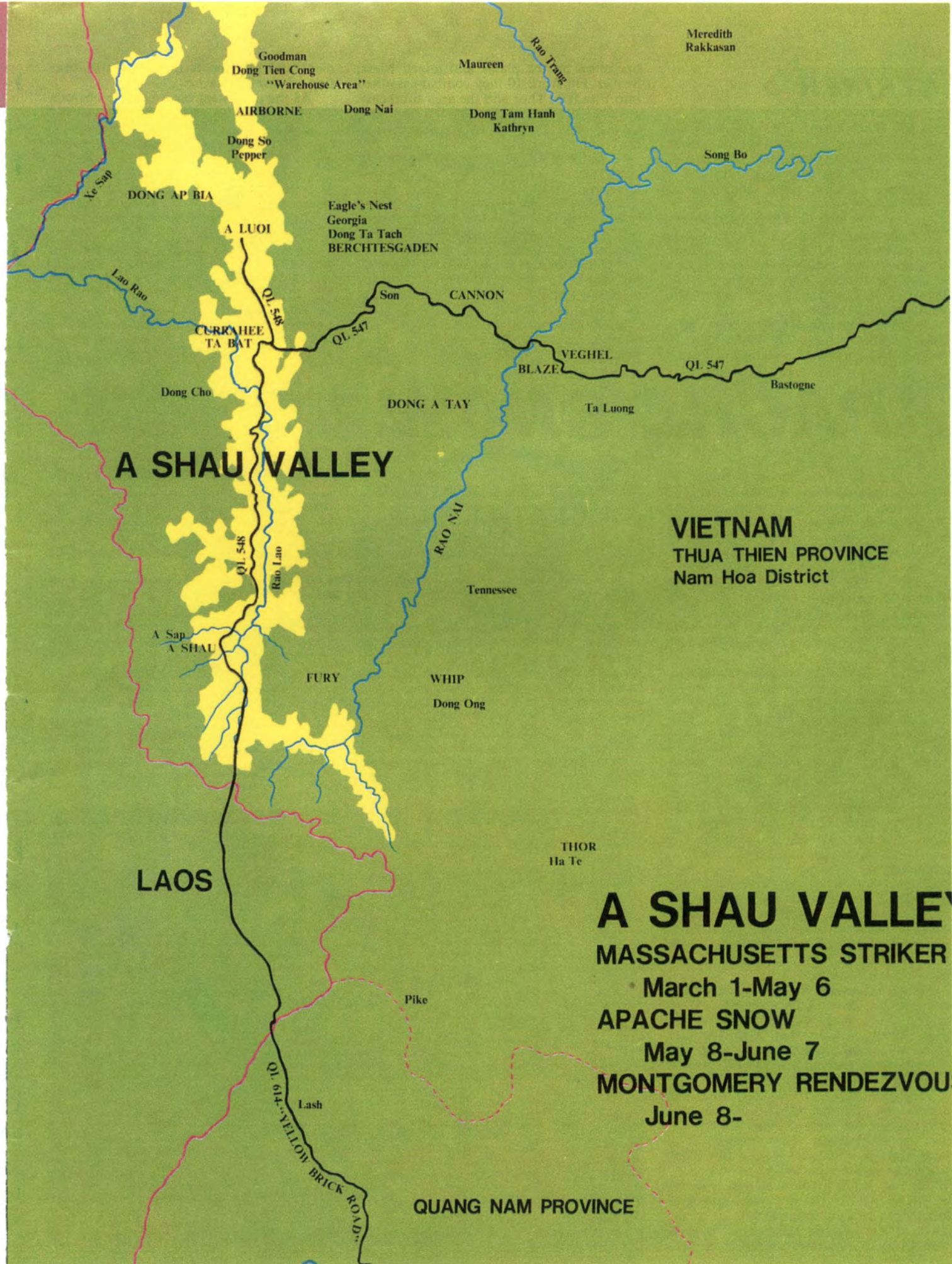
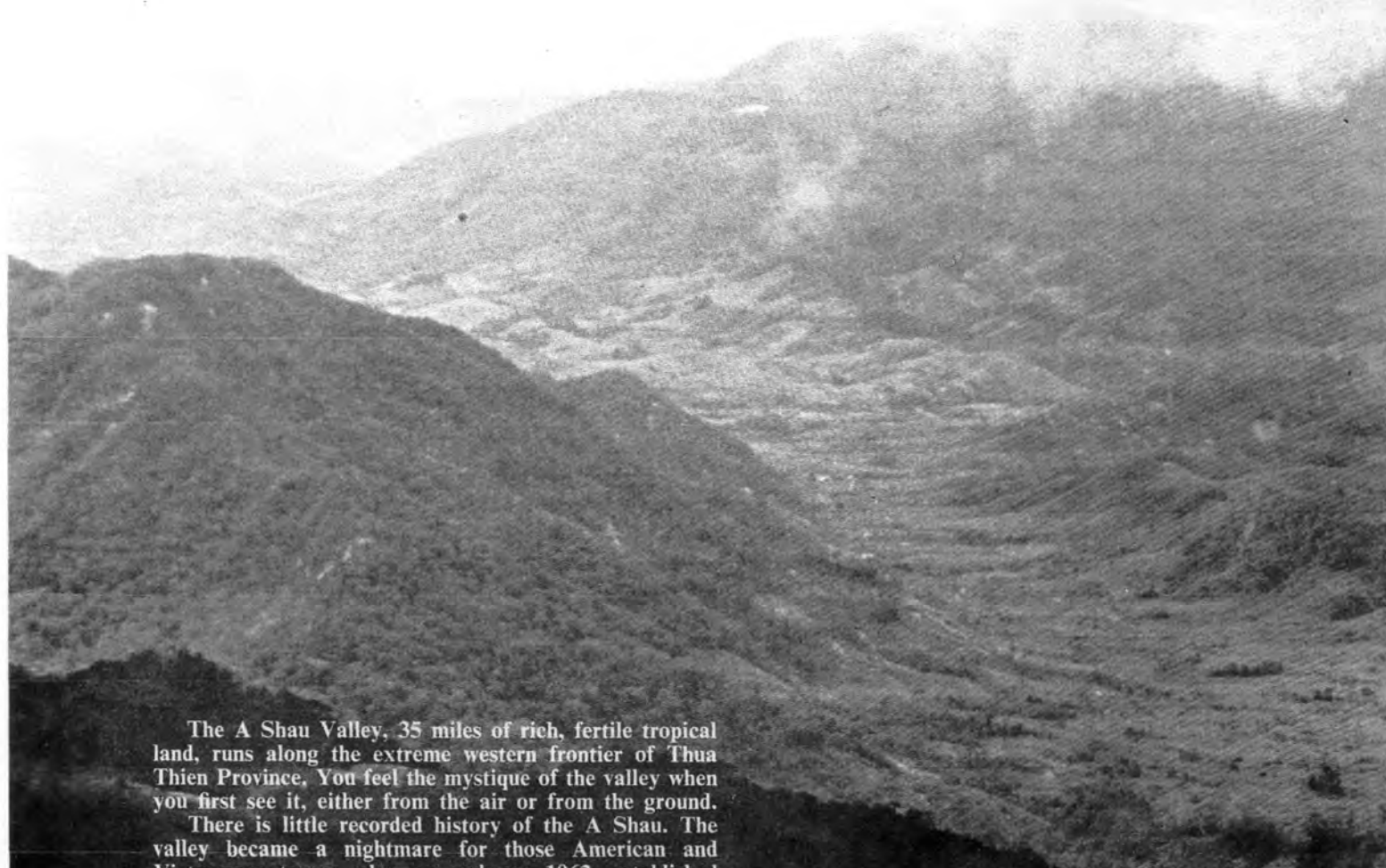






The A Shau Valley, 35 miles of rich, fertile tropical land, runs along the extreme western frontier of Thua Thien Province. You feel the mystique of the valley when you first see it, either from the air or from the ground.

There is little recorded history of the A Shau. The valley became a nightmare for those American and Vietnamese troops who, as early as 1962, established bases there—at A Luoi in the north central portion of the valley, Ta Bat in the middle and A Shau to the south. In addition to the three camps, with their tiny airstrips, there were approximately 30,000 inhabitants in the A Shau, Katu and Pakoh Montagnard tribesmen.

The three Special Forces-CIDG camps, one by one, were forced to close as the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese applied such pressure that it was impossible to continue operations. The problems of resupply, the weather and the enemy were the reasons for moving out of, first, A Luoi, then Ta Bat and, finally, in March 1966, A Shau.

Then, for two years, the valley belonged to the enemy.

It was not until 1968 that American and allied forces re-entered the A Shau, by then an enemy haven. Running the length of the valley was the enemy-built Route 548, which was carrying tons of enemy supplies to staging areas to support operations against Hue and Da Nang. Enemy infiltration went unhindered because the valley was tough—the enemy knew it and so did the allies.

Then, in May 1968, the sky troopers of the 1st Air Cavalry Division, supported on the east of the valley by the Screaming Eagle 1st Brigade, raided deep into the A Shau. Men and machines entered a place with a mystique—a strange, terrible world. The Cav left,

the Screaming Eagles pulled back—temporarily.

Yet the NVA knew that it was only a matter of time before the Yankee helicopters would return.

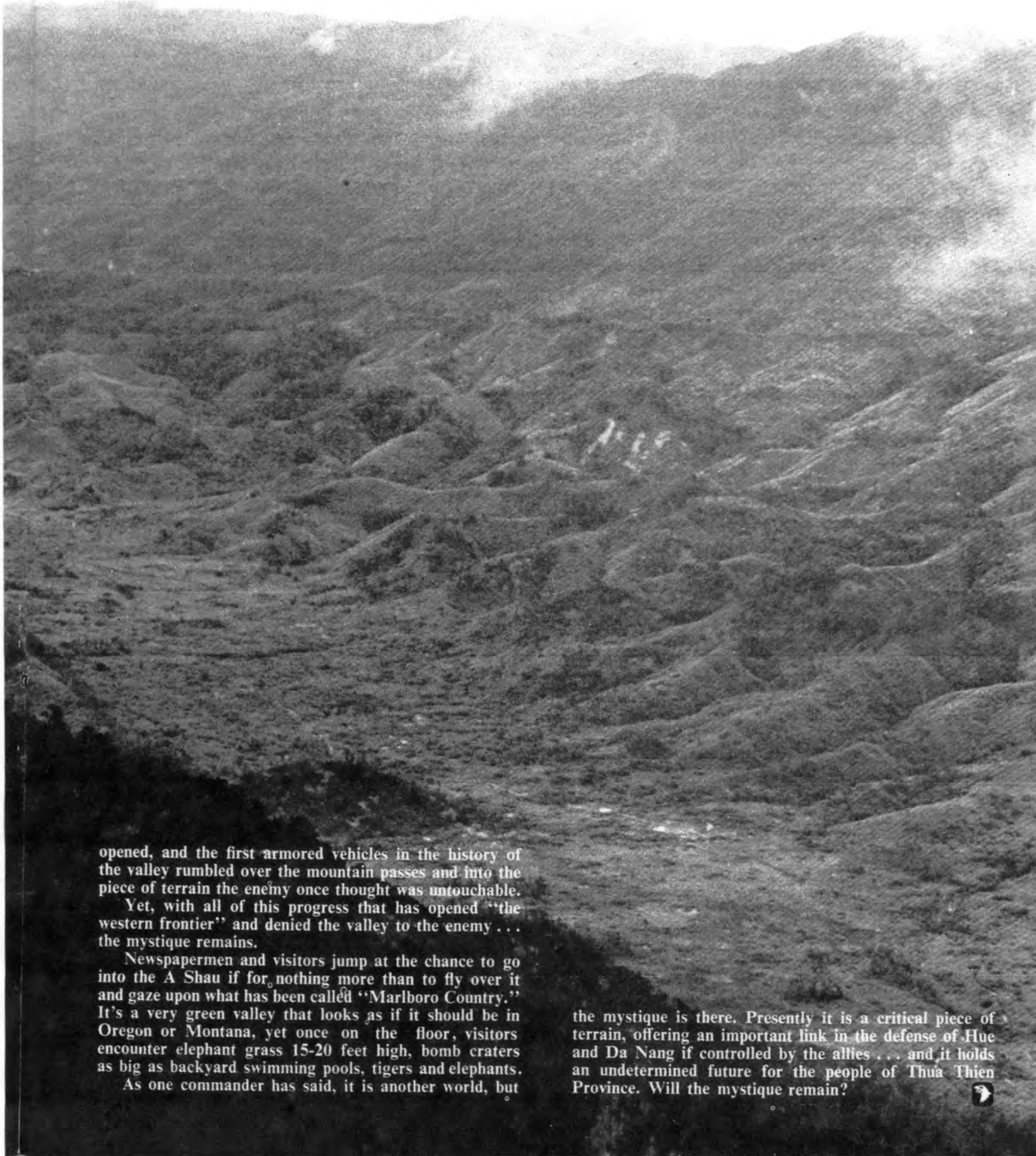
And return they did in August when the 101st Airborne put on a show of its new status—airmobility. Operation Somerset Plain was a 17-day raid into the valley designed to cut off enemy supply routes from the west. The Screaming Eagles defeated the enemy where they found him, but there was still that foreboding aura hanging over the valley—of darkness, of evil lurking.

Now the valley was becoming a dangerous place for the enemy also. The men with the eagle on their shoulders had destroyed base camps, discovered caches of weapons, ammunition and supplies. They would return, Maj. Gen. Melvin Zais, then Division commander, promised.

The final surge into the valley started in March of this year, and constant pressure has been maintained since. Operation Massachusetts Striker hit at the southern portion of the valley, putting a large dent in the enemy resources with the uncovering of one of the largest caches ever found in I Corps.

Then came Apache Snow in the central and northern portion of the valley, and the battle for Dong Ap Bia.

An assault airfield was constructed in 54 hours, Highway 547 connecting the lowlands with the interior was



opened, and the first armored vehicles in the history of the valley rumbled over the mountain passes and into the piece of terrain the enemy once thought was untouchable.

Yet, with all of this progress that has opened "the western frontier" and denied the valley to the enemy... the mystique remains.

Newspapermen and visitors jump at the chance to go into the A Chau if for nothing more than to fly over it and gaze upon what has been called "Marlboro Country." It's a very green valley that looks as if it should be in Oregon or Montana, yet once on the floor, visitors encounter elephant grass 15-20 feet high, bomb craters as big as backyard swimming pools, tigers and elephants.

As one commander has said, it is another world, but

the mystique is there. Presently it is a critical piece of terrain, offering an important link in the defense of Hue and Da Nang if controlled by the allies... and it holds an undetermined future for the people of Thua Thien Province. Will the mystique remain?

